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## **GAZETTE OPINION: BIG EFFORT NEEDED TO TAP POTENTIAL OF WIND POWER**

We certainly have a long way to go before 20 percent of our nation's electricity is provided by the wind.

But a U.S. Energy Department report says we can reach that level by 2030 - if a vast transmission system to move the power from a new crop of wind farms is created.

How tall is this task? U.S. wind farms are expected to produce more than 1 percent of the nation's electricity supply this year. How do we get to 20 percent? Power capacity would have to soar from the 11.6 gigawatt level of today to 300 gigawatts. Montana could see 5-10 gigawatts of wind power and Wyoming could see 10 gigawatts, according to models produced for the report. Another 100,000 turbines around the nation would be needed.

This recently released report, produced by several Energy Department labs and offices in collaboration with industry groups, said that the big jump in wind power "while ambitious, could be feasible if the significant challenges identified in this report are overcome."

One significant challenge is the price tag. This ambitious goal would take an investment of \$43 billion - which was calculated to be about 50 cents per month per household by 2030. Another challenge: building a "transmission superhighway system" that would be required to move power from generators in the middle of the nation to population centers and the coasts."

The report optimistically said that, "Meeting this challenge could be economically and technically feasible."

If that amount of new wind power were produced, the payoffs could be significant. Greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by 825 metric tons in 2030, the report said. Water consumption in the electric sector would be cut by 8 percent, or 4 trillion gallons - a big deal in the arid and fast-growing parts of the Western U.S.

We're making some progress. The U.S. wind energy industry installed 5,244 megawatts of generating capacity in 2007, a 45 percent jump in total wind power generating capacity in a single year, more than doubling the 2006 installation of 2,454 megawatts.

As America works to develop clean-coal technologies and find more domestic supplies of oil and gas, we need to support continued research and investment in wind energy. A diversified energy portfolio is a goal worth reaching.